

Long time Petersburg resident John Johnson passed away in Fulshear, Texas, April 1, 2015. He was 79.



John Webster Johnson was born December 4, 1935 in Petersburg, Alaska. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Blashke Island just south of Petersburg. In 1938, they moved to West Petersburg where his Dad worked at the Yukon Fur Farm. They remained there until 1941 when the family purchased their own mink farm which they operated until 1954. Catching fish for mink feed and beach seining in Petersburg Creek during the summers were some of his responsibilities.

John graduated from Petersburg High School in 1953. He then attended the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where in 1958 he was in the last graduating class from UAF, while Alaska was still a Territory. While there, he was lucky enough to attend all sessions of the formation and signing of the Alaska Constitution, participating as the ROTC honor guard during these sessions. John graduated with a degree in Education and was active in the US Army ROTC program.

Upon graduation, John was the first commissioned US Army Second Lieutenant in the newly formed State of Alaska. In 1961, John married his wife Dell while serving in the Army in Fairbanks, Alaska. They raised two sons, Joe and John (Jeff), both graduates of Petersburg High School.



After serving for 20 years in the US Army, John retired in 1979 as a Lieutenant Colonel. During his 20 years, he served two combat tours in Vietnam, one of which he served as the Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry...and finally, a tour in Korea on the DMZ.

John was also stationed in Alaska, Georgia, and California and as an ROTC instructor at CSU in Colorado. During this time, he mentored students and welcomed them into his home as a host family – some of whom have remained lifelong friends.

While in Alaska, notably, John was Operations Officer for the Military Humanitarian Mission sent to Valdez during the Great Alaska Earthquake in 1964. While working in Valdez, John developed his lifelong appreciation for the Salvation Army and their work in Alaskan communities.

Upon retirement from the Army, John returned home to Petersburg where he managed the Alaska Department of Labor Employment Office for 17 years. His final retirement was in 1995.

Active in public service and volunteer work, John has served as President, Rotary Club, Vice President, Chamber of Commerce, 2 terms on the Petersburg City Council, Petersburg Lutheran Church Council, Petersburg School Board, Chairman, Salvation Army Board, Council of Alcoholism and Youth Council, member of Pioneers of Alaska (Igloo #26), Elks Club, Lions Club (King City, CA), and a lifetime member of the VFW.

John received special recognition for his work with the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scout facility in Ft. Greely, Alaska is named after him, and he took several trips with the Boy Scouts including hiking the Chilkoot trail. John also has a scholarship named in his honor at UAF for Rural Students in Education.

John loved to travel – with trips to Europe, Asia, and Russia. In their trusty "Roadtrek" camper, John and Dell traveled over a 100,000 miles through 45 US states and around North America including the Canadian Arctic. John enjoyed history – and most of his trips included visits historical

places found in the US. John enjoyed being on the "road" support team for a few of the Klondike International Road Relay races from Skagway to Whitehorse assisting runners from Petersburg participating in the event. His trip to Siberia was as a goodwill ambassador for the Rotary Club. He visited Rotary Clubs across Australia, even visiting an exchange student from Petersburg while there.

John also liked to stay home. He was a regular for coffee at the Harbor office, and loved fishing on his boat the "Helly Erin," named after his granddaughters, with friends and visitors. He loved reading history and historical biographies. His library is filled with lovingly selected works from birthdays, father's days and Christmases.

John was preceded in death by his parents, Joe and Cora Johnson. He is survived by his wife Dell of Petersburg; son and daughter-in-law Joe and Shelley Johnson of Anacortes, Washington; son and daughter-in-law Jeff and Krista Johnson and their children Erin and Helly of Fulshear, Texas; brother and sister-in-law Jim and Doris Johnson of Tucson, Arizona; sister Lois Rhodes of Sitka, Alaska; and several nieces and nephews.